

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2509

April 11, 2023

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

Last month, I questioned you before the Senate Judiciary Committee about recent anti-Catholic actions by the Department of Justice. There was the targeting of Catholic pro-life activist Mark Houck with overwhelming FBI force—all based on a trumped-up charge, of which he was swiftly acquitted. And then there was the internal memorandum issued by the FBI’s Richmond field office calling for the reconnaissance and investigation of traditionalist Catholics.

Alarmed by this emerging pattern, I asked you directly whether the Department of Justice has “a problem with anti-Catholic bias.” Your response could not have been clearer: according to you, the Department of Justice “does not have any bias against any religion of any kind.”

I went on to ask you whether the Department was “cultivating sources and spies in Latin mass parishes and other Catholic parishes around the country.” And again, your response could not have been clearer: “No, the Justice Department does not do that. It does not do investigations based on religion.”

Finally, I asked you “how many informants do you have in Catholic churches across America?” You denied the claim a third time: “I don’t know, and I don’t believe we have any informants aimed at Catholic churches.”

All of this was false, as recent investigative findings by the House Judiciary Committee show. Following the revelation of the FBI’s Richmond memorandum, the Committee sought further information. And despite the FBI’s stonewalling, the Committee finally succeeded in extracting a heavily redacted document revealing damning facts.¹

What were those facts? First, the FBI’s infiltration proposal was apparently based on information from an undercover employee. The FBI *does* in fact have “informants aimed at Catholic churches,” contrary to your testimony. And second, the FBI apparently contemplated “engag[ing] in outreach to the leadership” of Catholic traditionalist parishes, for the purpose of “sensitiz[ing] these congregations to the warning signs of radicalization and [enlisting] their assistance to serve as suspicious activity tripwires.” This shows that the Department is clearly “cultivating sources and spies” in Catholic parishes, regardless of what you claimed before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

¹ <https://mobile.twitter.com/Weaponization/status/1645478587741372431>

And at this point, it is altogether unclear how many other FBI field offices received these directives. The potential scale of this anti-Catholic program is extremely concerning.

Let's be clear: your Department has decided to turn Catholic congregations into front organizations for the FBI, and when asked about it, you've decided to fudge the truth before Congress. This is an unconscionable assault on American Catholics' First Amendment rights and an abdication of your duty to enforce the law without fear or favor.

Everyone involved with this chilling surveillance campaign must face accountability. To that end, please immediately provide my office with responses to the following questions:

1. How many undercover informants or other agents in Catholic parishes or other organizations does the Department work with or otherwise employ?
2. How many undercover informants or other agents, in religious organizations more broadly, does the Department work with or otherwise employ?
3. Within which, and how many, FBI field offices was guidance related to the infiltration of traditionalist Catholic parishes distributed?

In addition, you must immediately comply with all oversight requests from the House Judiciary Committee.

I await your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long, horizontal stroke at the end.

Josh Hawley
United States Senator